Midlands Voices

UNO is interacting more with Omahans

BY ROBERT S. RUNYON
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Since 2000, the University of Nebraska at Omaha has evolved from an institution grogging for its urban identity and community niche to one increasingly committed to a strategic plan focused upon (1) putting students first, (2) achieving academic excellence and (3) engaging in community service.

This 11-year-old campus credo continues to gain force and momentum as increasing numbers of faculty, staff members and students collaboratively work to integrate UNO's educational goals and practices into the fabric of the Omaha community.

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Starting in October, multiple events will celebrate UNO's 100-year growth and future in the Omaha community. (Visit layers of university governance. Recent implementation phases involve ways to measure plan results and the incorporation of strategic priorities into departmental goals and individual performance reviews.

Undergirding these developments has been expanded use of technology for improved communication and greater individual participation. Though computers and networking once were considered the province of the few, they now provide multiple platforms for more intensive student, faculty and staff interaction.

A recent UNO public forum with community members, in which I participated, revealed the extent of these changes to me as a retired faculty member.

Another open forum a few weeks ago was likewise enlightening. Faculty members from diverse disciplines discussed environmental sustainability issues in the university.
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Starting in October, multiple events will celebrate UNO's 100-year growth and future in the Omaha community. (Visit the Web at www.uno100.org.)

UNO's signature Service Learning program began with just seven courses in 1997. By the 2006-07 academic year, the program had grown to more than 1,600 students in 110 classes in interdisciplinary programs across the university.

Ongoing relationships have been established with more than 200 community partners. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has recognized UNO among only 76 U.S. colleges and universities in its new Community Engagement Classification. (Visit www.unomaha.edu/servicelearning/index.php.)

The proverbial gap between the classroom and the world of work is steadily being broken down as faculty cross over disciplinary boundaries and reach out collaboratively to companies, agencies and institutions in the Omaha community. New programs of Service Learning engagement span most UNO colleges, with innovative linkages taking place among traditional academic disciplines and the issues, problems and opportunities latent within the local community.

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